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AUTHOR Laichas, Tom; Ingersoll, Tom
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ABSTRACT

This unit is one of a series that represents specific moments in history from which students focus on the meanings of landmark events. By studying primary sources of a crucial turning point in history, students become aware that choices had to be made by real human beings, that those decisions were the result of specific factors, and that they set in motion a series of historical consequences. The First Amendment guarantees each citizen's right "to petition the government for a redress of grievances." Within months after Congress sent the Bill of Rights to the states for ratification in 1789, antislavery forces took full advantage of this fundamental liberty. By doing so, they provoked Congressional debates so stormy that within 18 months of the Constitution's ratification the House of Representatives already rang with the dire threat of civil war. The United States was born with the problem of conflicting sectional interests, and this unit is designed to reveal that the debate over slavery, the most heated example of sectionalism, began almost immediately after ratification of the Constitution. This unit documents the first Congressional debates over slavery and raises for students the fundamental political questions regarding this national issue which remained significant through 1860. At the same time, the debates themselves refer frequently to the key political controversies of the 1790's, demonstrating that slavery was not debated in a political vacuum. Lesson plans include: (1) predicting political behavior; (2) accounting for political behavior in the 1790 and 1800 debates; and (3) evaluation of arguments. Contains 5 references. (Author/DK)

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ED 376 105

"THIS WILL NEVER BE SUBMITTED TO... WITHOUT A CIVIL WAR"

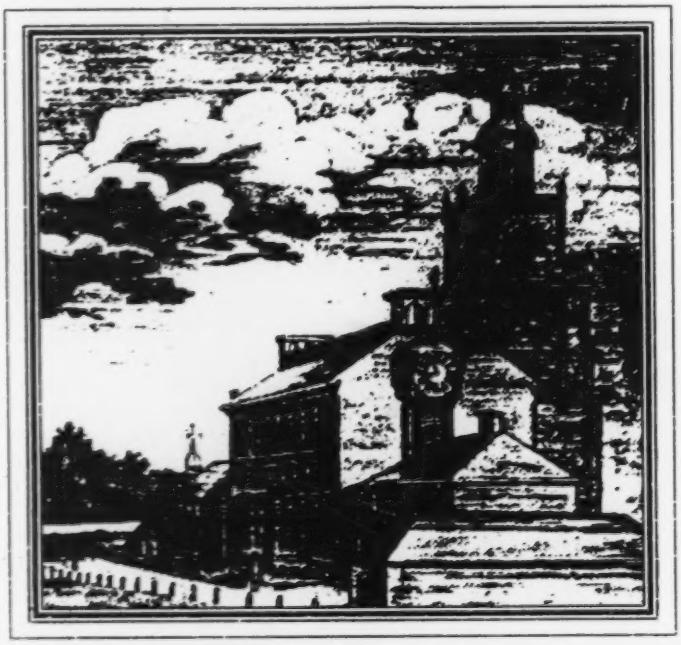
CONGRESS DEBATES SLAVERY, 1790-1800

A UNIT OF STUDY FOR GRADES 10 - 12

By Tom Laichas

&

Tom Ingersoll



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NATIONAL CENTER FOR HISTORY IN THE SCHOOLS
A Cooperative Research Program of the
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and the National Endowment for the Humanities

Gary B. Nash, Associate Director & Historical Consultant
Linda Symcox, Project Developer & Series Editor
Charlotte Crabtree, Director

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Finally, we acknowledge the continuing contributions of the National Endowment for the Humanities which established the National Center for History in the Schools in March 1988 and has generously supported this activity.

For information on additional teaching units and other resources from the Center, please write:

National Center for History in the Schools
University of California, Los Angeles
Moore Hall 231, 405 Hilgard Avenue
Los Angeles, CA 90024-1521

APPROACH AND RATIONALE

By Linda Symcox

The National Center for History in the Schools has developed the following collection of lessons for teaching **Congress Debates Slavery, 1790-1800**. Our units are the fruit of a year-long collaboration between history professors and experienced teachers of both United States and World History. They represent specific "**dramatic moments**" in history from which you and your students can pause to delve into the deeper meanings of selected landmark events and explore their wider context in the great historical narrative.

In our approach, the continuing narrative provides the context in which the dramatic moment is situated. By studying a crucial turning-point in history, the student becomes aware that choices had to be made by real human beings, that those decisions were the result of specific factors, and that they set in motion a series of historical consequences. We have selected dramatic moments that best bring alive that decision-making process. We hope that through this approach, your students will realize that history is an ongoing, open-ended process, and that the decisions they make today create the conditions of tomorrow's history.

Our dramatic moments are based on **primary sources**, taken from documents, artifacts, journals, diaries, newspapers and literature from the period under study. As you know, a primary source is a **first-hand** account of any event in history. For example, the telecast or the script of a speech would be a primary source. A secondary source is a **second-hand** account of an event. This would be, for example, the newspaper account of the speech the next day or a newscaster's report about the speech. All historical accounts, such as textbooks, are by their very

nature secondary sources. What we hope to achieve using primary source documents in these lessons is to remove the distance that students feel from historical events and to connect them more intimately with the past. In this way we hope to re-create for your students a sense of "being there," a sense of seeing history through the eyes of the very people who were making decisions. This will help your students develop historical empathy, to realize that history is not an impersonal process divorced from real people like themselves. At the same time, by analyzing primary sources, students will actually practice the historian's craft, discovering for themselves how to analyze evidence, establish a valid interpretation and construct a coherent narrative in which all the relevant factors play a part.

CONTENT AND ORGANIZATION

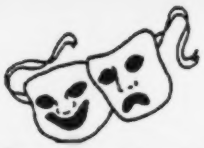
Within this unit, you will find: 1) **Teacher Background Materials** and 2) **Lesson Plans** with **Student Resources**. This unit, as we have said above, focuses on certain key moments in time and should be used as a supplement to your customary course materials. We have chosen to pitch the various lessons on different grade levels and they can usually be adapted to a slightly higher or lower level.

The **Teacher Background** section should provide you with a good overview of the entire unit and with the historical information and context necessary to link the specific **Dramatic Moment** to the larger historical narrative. You may consult it for your own use, and you may choose to share it with students if they are of a sufficient grade level to understand the materials.

The **Lesson Plans** include a variety of ideas and approaches for the teacher which can be elaborated upon or

cut as you see the need. These lesson plans contain student resources which accompany each lesson. These resources consist of primary source documents, any handouts or student background materials, and in many cases, a bibliography for the unit.

In our series of teaching units, each collection can be taught in several ways. You can teach all of the lessons offered on any given topic, or you can select and adapt the ones that best support your particular course needs. We have not attempted to be comprehensive or prescriptive in our offerings, but rather to give you an array of enticing possibilities for in-depth study, at varying grade levels. We hope that you will find the lesson plans exciting and stimulating for your classes. We also hope that your students will never again see history as a boring sweep of inevitable facts and meaningless dates but rather as an endless treasure of real life stories, and an exercise in analysis and reconstruction, rather than rote memorization.



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
DEBATE ON A PETITION FROM ABSALOM JONES AND OTHER "FREE MEN OF COLOR" OF PHILADELPHIA
JANUARY, 1800

The following debate took place on Thursday, January 2 and Friday, January 3, regarding a petition from Absalom Jones and other "free men of color" of Philadelphia. The Congressional Record reported that:

> ***....That solemn compact, the Constitution, was violated by the trade of kidnapping, carried on by the people of some of the Southern States...by which numbers were...torn from their families and...inhumanely exposed to sale, which was degrading to the dignified nature of man.***
>
> ***That by these and other measures injurious to the human species, there were 700,000 blacks now in slavery in these States.***
>
> ***They stated their application to Congress to be, not for the immediate emancipation of the whole, knowing that their degraded state and want of education would render that improper, but they ask for an amelioration of their hard situation. They prayed that the act called the fugitive bill, which was very severe on that race of people, might be considered, also that the African slave trade might be [stopped].***

TEACHER BACKGROUND MATERIALS

I. UNIT OVERVIEW AND RATIONALE

The First Amendment guarantees each citizen's right "to petition the government for a redress of grievances." Within months after Congress sent the Bill of Rights to the states for ratification in 1789, antislavery forces took full advantage of this fundamental liberty. By doing so, they provoked Congressional debates so stormy that within eighteen months of the Constitution's ratification the House of Representatives already rang with the dire threat of "civil war."

The country was born with the problem of conflicting sectional interests, and this unit is designed to reveal that the debate over slavery, the most heated example of sectionalism, began almost immediately after ratification of the Constitution. This unit documents the first Congressional debates over slavery and raises for students the fundamental political questions regarding this national issue which remained significant through 1860. At the same time, the debates themselves refer frequently to the key political controversies of the 1790's, demonstrating that slavery was not debated in a political vacuum.

II. UNIT CONTEXT

These lessons would be appropriate at several points. They can be taught at the end of a study of the ideals of the American Revolution, within the context of a broader study of the Constitution and the Bill of Rights, as a study of the growing diversity of political, social, and economic activity, the early national period, or a study of slavery and its legacy.

III. UNIT OBJECTIVES

1. To establish the significance of the debate over slavery since the time of the nation's founding.

2. To link the issues raised in the early debate over slavery to economic, religious, and foreign policy issues of the 1790's.

3. To explore the components of political motivation (i.e. the roles that regional affiliation, ideology, religion, and economic interest played in determining each debater's position on this issue).

IV. INTRODUCTION TO CONGRESS DEBATES SLAVERY, 1790 - 1800

General Overview

Although African-Americans petitioned against slavery before the American Revolution and Quakers sought to abolish the practice, its existence did not trouble most Americans. The Revolutionary War, however, changed their perceptions.

The Revolution has been characterized as the greatest slave revolt in American history; thousands of slaves ran to British lines, some providing willing service to the British armed forces. This fact alone convinced many Revolutionary leaders that, if nothing else, the existence of slavery posed a danger to the Republic in wartime.

But more than this pragmatic concern was at work. Slavery was, in fact, widely recognized to be incompatible with the natural rights philosophy of the Revolution. Published attacks on slavery by Montesquieu in Spirit of the Laws (1748), by Adam Smith in Theory of Moral Sentiments (1764), by James Otis in Rights of the British Colonies (1764), and in pamphlets by Benjamin Rush (1773) and Thomas Paine (1775) were widely read. The swelling anti-slavery protest was joined by those influenced by religious arguments of Quakers, Calvinists and Presbyterians who condemned the evils of slavery and warned of the divine wrath to be visited upon those who sustained it. It was no accident that in the generation after the Revolution half the states which had permitted slavery before 1776 outlawed it. Those states were, of course, north of the Mason-Dixon line where slaves constituted only a small proportion of the population. But even in the South there were those who worked for its abolition.

The South was not a monolithic region but was divided broadly into three regions. The "backcountry"—upland areas along the Appalachians—was for the most part farmed in small plots by men and women of Scots-Irish and German origin. Without the political power and wealth of the coastal planters, they held few slaves and played only a limited role as yet in Southern politics.

It was in the two coastal regions where power and wealth resided. In South Carolina, rice provided large profits to planters whose African-American slaves outnumbered whites in the colony. Not surprisingly, it was South Carolinians and Georgians who through 1860 defended slavery most emphatically.

Anti-slavery sentiment was, by contrast, widespread among the educated generation of tobacco planters of Virginia and Maryland who had been influenced by the natural rights philosophy of the Enlightenment and who supported the ban on further slave importation written into Virginia's state constitution of 1776. These gentlemen planters, including among their numbers Jefferson, Mason, and Madison, dominated not only regional politics but the national scene as well. Though Virginia legislators struck Jefferson's clause abolishing slavery beyond the generation alive on December 31, 1800 from the 1783 draft of the Commonwealth of Virginia's Constitution, support remained among some state leaders for achieving abolition one way or another. Because tobacco prices and profits had declined in the 1770s and because further slave imports had been banned, many believed that slavery itself would gradually die. National abolition, some argued, was therefore unnecessary; if, in addition, abolition turned South Carolina and Georgia against the Union, the price would be too high.

The North, too, was diverse. The most committed aboli-

tionists were Northerners, particularly Pennsylvanians. The Society of Friends (Quakers) had begun a campaign against slavery in the 1750s. In 1780, Pennsylvania became the first state to pass a gradual abolition act. Further, Philadelphia was home to the nation's largest population of free African-Americans whose innovative community-building and political activism left a lasting legacy for African-Americans, slave and free.

Elsewhere in the North opinions regarding slavery were mixed. On the one hand, most of the political leadership professed a profound distaste for slavery. But there was substantial division over how to deal with it. A few called for unconditional abolition, but others hoped to resettle freed slaves in Africa. Some feared the end of slavery, reasoning that, once free, former slaves would wander the country, illiterate and propertyless, constituting a dangerous class.

By the early 1800s northern sentiments were, in fact, turning strongly against the increasing thousands of free blacks seeking a new life in northern cities. In about 1805 free blacks were driven from Philadelphia's Fourth of July celebrations in Independence Square by their belligerent white neighbors. Within the decade a black northern church had been torched in Philadelphia, City of Brotherly Love. Bloody attacks on black neighborhoods and militant demonstrations provided evidence that sentiments for abolition were not universal in the North. With increasing northern investment in the cotton economy, northern voices joined those of the South in defense of slavery.

Thus, the window of opportunity provided by the revolutionary fervor of 1776 and the high republican ideals of the early national period was rapidly closing. Southern leaders appealing for abolition were in truth

appealing for national assistance in what had become a national issue. Voices were divided on this issue in both North and South. The failure of these appeals to engender the support required to end slavery was the great tragedy of these years, condemning the nation to the bloody costs of Civil War some fifty years later.

The 1790 Debates

Congressional debates over two abolitionist petitions are adapted here for classroom use. The first debate focuses on a 1790 memorial from Benjamin Franklin on behalf of the Pennsylvania Society for the Abolition of Slavery, a group dominated by Philadelphia Quakers. The second concerns a petition written in 1800 by Absalom Jones on behalf of other "free men of color" in Philadelphia. Having received each petition, members of House had to determine whether to reject the petitions or to "commit" them to a committee of the House for fuller consideration.

The Constitution clearly forbade Congress from halting the African slave trade until 1808. Further, in the Fifth Amendment, the Constitution protected property from government seizure. If slaves were property, abolition would violate the Constitution. Those who opposed commitment of the petitions emphasized repeatedly that they called on Congress to act unconstitutionally. To these representatives, any threat to slavery was a threat to private property rights.

In the background of the debate over the 1790 petition was the Constitution itself. One of the biggest problems confronting the delegates to the Constitutional Convention was whether or not slaves would be included in state population totals for the purpose of apportioning representation in the House of Representatives. If slaves were counted, as Southern delegates insisted they should be,

the South would have an advantage over the North. But, Southerners argued, their special system of labor demanded special protections. After wrenching debate, the Convention finally agreed (Article I, Section 2:3) to add three-fifths of the number of slaves to the number of free persons when determining a state's population for the purposes of apportioning representation and taxes.

Critics feared that the three-fifths measure would encourage Southern states to increase imports of African slaves in order to increase representation in Congress. The delegates thrashed out a compromise on this issue as well (Article III, Section 9:1) which prohibited the federal government from suppressing the slave trade for the twenty years following the Constitution's ratification. The African slave trade was in fact abolished in 1808.

Finally, delegates borrowed a phrase from the Northwest Ordinance which guaranteed that a runaway slave would not be freed in a northern state (Article IV, Section 2:3). This "fugitive slave" provision would in the 1840s and 1850s cause much controversy as the "personal liberty laws" of states such as Pennsylvania directly flouted the Constitution's authority.

These three provisions constituted the evidence southern planters and others cited when arguing in the 1790 debate that any action against slavery would be unconstitutional. Despite these measures, the Bill of Rights included the right "to petition the government for a redress of grievances," and those who opposed slavery exercised that right even before the first ten amendments were ratified. On February 8, 1790, the House of Representatives began debate on Hamilton's proposals to fund the national debt. The introduction during the debate of two Quaker petitions against slavery inspired brief but violent outbursts from some southern congressmen. Debate on

Hamilton's proposal was, however, quickly resumed. However, on February 12, Congress heard another anti-slavery petition, this one submitted by the powerful Pennsylvania Abolition Society and signed by a list of well-known and respected men—among them Benjamin Franklin who, after George Washington, was the nation's most distinguished citizen. All informed people were aware of South Carolinian and Georgian threats to leave the Union if Congress acted on such a petition or to resort, as Thomas Tucker put it, to "civil war." Representatives from New England and the Middle Atlantic states who did not wish to alienate southern support for Hamilton's proposals sought to prevent consideration of the petition. Nevertheless, the House suspended debate on Hamilton's plan and gave over the entire legislative day to considering whether to create a special committee to prepare a report specifying what powers Congress might have over slavery.

Of those sympathetic to the petitioners (not all of whom were Northerners), a few rejected entirely the notion that the Constitution forbade abolition. Massachusetts Representative George Thatcher argued that slavery attacked basic human rights protected under the Constitution; if continued, slavery would "fix a national indignity and stigma which ages of good actions could never wipe away." Madison argued there were a number of ways by which Congress might constitutionally abolish slavery. Yet most of those who favored further consideration of the petitions did not try to argue that the Constitution would permit abolition. Rather they noted that Congress could, for example, levy a $10.00 tax on each slave brought to the United States. This would drive up the price and discourage further purchases.

But the debates did not long remain upon the high ground of Constitutional interpretation. Those who

championed slavery lashed out at the petitioners themselves. Speakers accused Pennsylvania's Quaker merchants, who had refused on religious grounds to take up arms during the Revolution, of profiting from war contracts. How, they asked, could such hypocrites be so self-righteous? Pro-slavery speakers also played upon the common view that Quaker doctrines and those of a related sect, the Shakers, constituted a religious "fanaticism." In this view, the Society of Friends was a mere cult whose religious notions were fit objects of humor. Finally, it was charged, the Quakers had cleverly tried to deceive Congress. The petition from Philadelphia's free African-Americans could not, speakers suggested, have actually been written by illiterate blacks. Obviously, opponents claimed, it was the work of Quakers who wished to give Congress the impression that others besides themselves felt strongly about this issue.

The 1800 Debates

Between 1790 and 1800 conditions had changed dramatically. Though the profitability of slavery had been open to question at the beginning of the decade, the spread of cotton agriculture after 1793 resulted in increased demand for labor and skyrocketing prices for slaves. While the older settled regions sold thousands of slaves to new cotton plantations in the former "backcountry," merchants imported thousands of "new" slaves from Africa as well.

More significantly, southern planters were profoundly shocked by the bloody, prolonged, and ultimately successful Haitian Revolution. This revolution had been simmering since 1791 in the French colony then known as St. Domingue in the Caribbean, but fighting spread when the revolutionary French National Assembly declared equal rights for all African-Americans in 1793. Subse-

quent French governments annulled this act and attempted to reestablish slavery in Haiti—but to no avail; by 1803 the black army of Toussaint L'Ouverture had defeated a force sent to Haiti by Napoleon.

Slaves in the United States were aware of this bitter conflict despite terrified masters' attempts to keep them ignorant of it. Fearing revolt, some slaveholders sought to end slavery. Washington himself in his will freed his slaves in 1799.

St. George Tucker, a prominent Virginian lawyer and state officeholder, feared that the combined forces of the South's burgeoning enslaved population and the successful Haitian Revolution would bring the future ruin of the region, and launched an appeal, published in Philadelphia, for gradual abolition on grounds of national principles of freedom and equality for all men. Within months, Jefferson echoed the appeal. Gradual abolition, it was argued, would permit freed men and women to acquire the skills to live independently. The availability of larger tracts of uninhabited western lands would provide for their voluntary resettlement.

Other plans followed. Madison's plan of 1819 took into account the $240 million he estimated would be required to resettle the freedmen on western lands. Jefferson's 1824 plan included federal financing through sales of western lands. Many others, however, regarded criticism of slavery as a threat not only to their property but to public order. Since the Democratic-Republican party had been sympathetic to the French Revolution in its early years, the Federalists lost no opportunity to smear their political opponents by associating them with the violent revolutionaries of France and Haiti. They also repeated charges heard in 1790 that abolitionists consisted entirely of Quakers whose pacifism during the

Revolution could be read as treasonous.

The debates, then, reveal much about the politics of the nation's first decade under its new Constitution. Sectional division, racial and religious prejudice, conflicting constitutional interpretation, and an unsettled international scene all characterize the fight over these two petitions. Other issues of the period—Hamilton's economic program, European revolution and war, and the rise of the Jeffersonian Republicans—all were of tremendous significance for the United States. Few other issues, however, were more ominous for the country's future.

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V. A NOTE ON SOURCES

The debate transcript is adapted from the *Congressional Record* for the First and Sixth Congresses. The biographies are based on those in the Biographical Directory of the American Congress, 1774-1971 (United States Government Printing Office, 1971).

Presumably, the *Congressional Record* consists of business transacted on the floor of the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives. Unfortunately, Congress has interpreted its power to "correct" the *Record* very liberally. Many of the speeches appearing in the record were never delivered but were included in the *Record* for the benefit of voters back home.

No effort was made to determine whether the speeches included in this packet were actually delivered. Even so, they do represent a reliable guide to representatives' public views.

The numbers of representatives in the House generally precluded direct one-on-one debate. These debates therefore do not move from point to counterpoint. Instead, comments appear in the order that the Speaker of the House recognized members of Congress to speak.

A few notes about the adaptation:

1. The *Record* usually transcribed speeches in third person; this version converts all speeches to first person.

2. The adaptation preserves the language of the excerpts. A substantial vocabulary list follows.

3. These excerpts represent only a small portion of the

Record's transcripts for these debates.

4. To clarify some remarks, words have been added in brackets. Ellipses designate material edited from a speech.

VI. LESSON PLANS

1. **Predicting Political Behavior**

2. **Accounting for Political Behavior in the 1790 and 1800 Debates**

3. **Evaluation of Arguments**

VII. PREPARATION FOR LESSONS

Students should be familiar with the following:

- Origins and course of the American Revolution.
- Ideas expressed in the Preamble to the Declaration of Independence.
- Constitutional Convention and debates.
- Development of African slavery in British North America.

Students would also benefit from some knowledge of the following:

- Constitutional provisions regarding slavery.
- French Revolution and its impact on U.S. politics.
- Free Black community and culture in the post-Revolutionary United States.

ACCOUNTING FOR POLITICAL BEHAVIOR

A. Objectives

1. Students will analyze biographical information about representatives in Congress.

2. Students will assess the importance of this information in predicting the political position of representatives.

B. Lesson Activities (One Day)

1. Introduce the material through a lecture or assigned reading on the provisions in the Constitution addressing the issue of slavery.

2. Have students read the **WORKSHEET INSTRUCTIONS**, (for using **WORKSHEETS I** and **II**) and **DOCUMENTS A** and **B**, biographies of representatives involved in the debates of 1790 and 1800.

3. Students can now complete **WORKSHEET I**. This worksheet requires students to extract information from the biographies in **DOCUMENTS A** and **B**. They are then to assess how important that information might be in determining the political position of each member of the House of Representatives. In completing this worksheet, students might work in groups of four, each group responsible for one or several House members.

a. Discuss students' findings. The following questions may assist in developing class discussion:

   - *What motivates people to take particular political positions?*

- *Are those motivations reflected in these biographical sketches?*
- *What biographical information seems the most important?*
- *What facts about these representatives are not included but might assist in predicting their political behavior?*
- *Based on your conclusions, which of the debaters seems most likely to oppose the petitions? Which to support them?*

4. Homework Assignment:

   Have students complete the first column only of **WORKSHEET II.**

C. Extended Activities

The following are several alternative ways to use and extend the materials in this unit packet:

1. *Re-enacting the Debates.* At the start of the unit, assign each student a specific representative. Have students work through Lesson One as described, and have them predict their representative's position based on the biographical data. Once they have made their prediction, students will go to **WORKSHEET III,** which requires that they write a speech based on their prediction. Students will deliver that speech to the class.

2. Written speeches might then be subject to rebuttal from students who believe that their own representative would have disagreed with the speaker. Such presentations can, then, be organized as a series of brief speeches or as a formal debate.

3. Following the presentations, have students check their predictions against the actual debate transcripts. It is important that students be assessed on their writing and presentation. So long as their hypothesis was based on the evidence available to them, they should not be evaluated according to the accuracy of their prediction.

INSTRUCTIONS FOR USING WORKSHEETS I & II

The First Amendment, ratified in 1791, protects every citizen's right "to petition the government for a redress of grievances." Even before its ratification, those who opposed slavery took full advantage of this provision. Two of the most significant groups opposing slavery in the first decades of this country's history were the Society of Friends (better known as the Quakers) and free African community itself.

Both groups sent to Congress frequent petitions, or "memorials," before the Civil War. The two petitions included in this packet are among the earliest. The first, sent by Benjamin Franklin on behalf of the Pennsylvania Society for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery, was considered by the House of Representatives in February, 1790. The second, from Absalom Jones on behalf of other "free men of color" in Philadelphia, provoked a House debate in January, 1800.

The most important question in both debates was whether the petitions should even be considered. Such consideration would require "committing" the petitions to House committees composed of a portion of the House membership. Such a committee would recommend action to the full House.

Your tasks will be:

1. To predict how fourteen House members responded to the petition based on biographical information included in this packet and to write brief speeches using some of the vocabulary used in the actual debates;

or

2. To predict the regional and party loyalties of the fourteen House members based on their speeches and write brief speeches on other subjects of concern in the 1790s;

or

3. To evaluate the persuasiveness of the arguments presented in these debates.

STUDENT RESOURCE: DOCUMENT A

BIOGRAPHIES OF SELECTED MEMBERS OF THE FIRST CONGRESS (1789-1791) DEBATES OF FEBRUARY, 1790

(Secondary Source)

Mr. Burke: Aedanus Burke, a representative from South Carolina. Born in Ireland, he emigrated as a young man to South Carolina. There he served in several state offices. An Anti-Federalist, he opposed the Constitution as a delegate to the South Carolina ratification convention in 1788. He was elected to the First Congress but declined nomination for a second term, becoming a state judge instead and serving in that capacity until his death in 1802.

Mr. Gerry: Elbridge Gerry, a representative from Massachusetts. Gerry was born in Marblehead, Massachusetts in 1744. Having pursued classical studies, he graduated from Harvard College in 1762 and engaged in commercial pursuits. He was a member of the Colonial House of Representatives in Massachusetts (1772-1775), a member of the Continental Congress (1776-1785) and a signer of the Declaration of Independence. A delegate to the Constitutional Convention of 1787, he refused to sign the document, claiming that it gave too much power to the President. He was elected as an Anti-Federalist to the First and Second Congresses (1789-1793). He was sent on a diplomatic mission with John Marshall and Charles Pinckney to France in 1797, a mission that resulted in the notorious XYZ affair. He ran for governor of Massachusetts unsuccessfully in 1801, but was elected to that post in 1810 and again in 1811. Following yet another losing battle for the governorship in 1812, he was elected Vice President on a ticket with James Madison, serving from 1813 to his death in 1814.

Mr. Jackson: James Jackson, a representative and later a senator from Georgia. Jackson was born in England in 1757, emigrating to Georgia in 1772. He served in a number of colonial offices during the 1770's. He declined to serve as governor when elected in 1778, choosing instead to serve as captain and then commander of the Georgia Legionary Forces in the Revolutionary War and receiving from the British the surrender of Savannah. He served in the First and Second Congresses as a Representative, then moved on to the United States Senate, where he served from 1793 until his resignation in 1795. A Democratic presidential elector in 1797, he cast his ballot for Jefferson and Clinton. He served as governor of Georgia from 1798-1801 and again as Senator from 1801 until his

death in 1806.

Mr. Madison: James Madison, a representative from Virginia. James Madison was born in Virginia in 1751. He studied under private tutors and graduated from Princeton College in 1771, remaining there another year to study law. From 1774 through 1817, he served as: member of the committee of safety from Orange County (1774), delegate in the Virginia convention of May 1776, member of the First General Assembly of Virginia (1776), member of the Executive Council of Virginia (1778), member of the Continental Congress (1780-1783, 1786-1788), delegate to the Constitutional Convention (1787), member of the House of Representatives (1789-1797), member of the Virginia Assembly (1799), presidential elector (1800; voted for Jefferson and Burr), Secretary of State to President Thomas Jefferson (1801-1809), President of the United States (1809-1817). Following his presidency, he retired to his plantation estate at Montpelier, Virginia, but served as a delegate to the Virginia Constitutional Convention of 1829. He died in 1836.

Mr. Scott: Thomas Scott, a representative from Pennsylvania. Born in Pennsylvania in 1739, he became an attorney and moved from private practice to local and then state judicial posts during the Revolution. As a delegate to his state's ratifying convention in 1787, he voted in favor of the Constitution. He served in the First and Third Congresses. He died in 1796.

Mr. Seney: Joshua Seney, a representative from Maryland. Seney was born in Maryland and worked there as an attorney just before the Revolution. He was a member of the State House of Delegates in the late 1780's, of the Continental Congress in 1787 and 1788, and of the First and Second Congresses from 1789 to 1792. He then accepted appointment as Chief Justice of the 3rd judicial district of Maryland. In the election of 1792 he served as a presidential elector, casting his vote for Washington and Adams.

Mr. Smith: William Loughton Smith, a representative from South Carolina. Smith was born in Charleston, S. C. in 1758. He attended preparatory schools in England 1770-74; studied law in the Middle Temple at London, England, in 1774, pursued higher studies in Geneva, Switzerland, 1774-78, returning to Charleston in 1783. In South Carolina he both ran his own plantation and established a private legal practice. He served in several state offices during the 1780's and in 1788 was elected as a Federalist to the House of Representatives, where he served

through 1797, when he was appointed United States Minister to Portugal and Spain. He served in this capacity until 1801, returning then to his plantation. In 1804, 1806, and 1808 he failed to regain his seat in the House. In 1808 he returned to South Carolina's own House of Representatives. He died in 1812.

Mr. Tucker: Thomas Tudor Tucker, representative from South Carolina. Tucker was born in Bermuda, studied medicine at the University of Edinburgh, and served as a surgeon in the Revolutionary War. He was a member of the Continental Congress in 1787 and 1788 and was then elected as a Federalist to the First and Second Congresses, serving from 1789 to 1793. Later appointed U.S. Treasurer by Thomas Jefferson, he served in that capacity until his death in 1828.

Adapted from the *Biographical Directory of the American Congress, 1774-1971* (United States Government Printing Office, 1971).

BIOGRAPHIES OF SELECTED MEMBERS OF THE SIXTH CONGRESS (1799-1801) DEBATES OF JANUARY, 1800

(Secondary Source)

Mr. Dana: Samuel Wittlesey Dana, a representative from Connecticut. Dana was born in Connecticut in 1760, attended Yale College, and subsequently trained for a legal career. A member of the Connecticut General Assembly from 1789-1796, he was elected as a Federalist to the Fourth Congress, serving from 1797-1810. In 1810, he became a United States Senator, serving in this capacity until 1821. Following his retirement from the Senate, he served as a presiding judge of the Middlesex (Connecticut) County Court until his death in 1830.

Mr. Jones: James Jones, a representative from Georgia. Jones was born in Maryland, moving to Georgia as a child. He attended a private academy in Augusta, Georgia, subsequently studying law and opening a legal practice in Savannah. Following service with the state militia in 1790, he served in the Georgia House of Representatives, played a role in rewriting the state's constitution, and was elected as a Democratic-Republican to the Sixth Congress, serving from 1799 to his death in 1801.

Mr. Lee: Henry Lee, representative from Virginia. Lee was born at his father's plantation in Virginia in 1756. He pursued classical studies, graduating from Princeton College in 1773. He served in both Virginia and Continental forces during the Revolutionary War, earning recognition from the Continental Congress for "remarkable prudence, address, and bravery" in one engagement. "Light Horse Harry", as he was known, was commissioned a lieutenant colonel in 1780 and a major general in 1798, leaving active service in 1800. He was a member of the Continental Congress from 1785 to 1788, advocated adoption of the Federal Constitution in the Virginia ratification convention of 1788, was Governor of Virginia, 1791-1794, commanded U.S. forces against the Whiskey rebels in 1794, and was elected as a Federalist to the Sixth Congress, serving from 1799 to 1801. On George Washington's death in 1799, Congress called on Lee to deliver the eulogy; it was Lee who characterized Washington as "first in war, first in peace, and first in the hearts of his countrymen." Lee died in Georgia in 1818.

Mr. Otis: Harrison Gray Otis, a representative from Massachusetts. Otis was

born in 1765. He attended Harvard University, studied law, and was admitted to the bar in 1786. After practicing law for ten years, he was elected to the Massachusetts House of Representatives in 1796. In the same year, President Washington appointed him U.S. District Attorney for Massachusetts. The following year, he was elected as a Federalist to the House of Representatives, where he served from 1797-1801. Following his service in the House, he served successively as a member, speaker, and president of the Massachusetts Senate, an overseer of Harvard University, a delegate to the Hartford Convention of 1814, a state Judge, a United States Senator (1817-1822), and Mayor of Boston (1829-1832). He died in 1848.

Mr. Rutledge: John Rutledge, Jr., Representative from South Carolina. Rutledge was born in Charleston, South Carolina in 1766. He received private instruction and attended school in Charleston and Philadelphia. He studied law with his father, becoming an attorney as well as a planter. A member of the State House of Representatives from 1788-1794, he lost a race for election to the U.S. House of Representatives in 1794 but was elected as a Federalist to the House in 1796, serving until 1803. A later run for his old congressional seat failed. From 1803 to his death in 1819 he divided his time between his law practice, his plantation, and his service as a commander in the South Carolina Militia, which he led in the War of 1812.

Mr. Thatcher: George Thatcher (also spelled Thacher), a representative from Massachusetts. Born in Massachusetts in 1754, Thatcher prepared for college with a private instructor. He graduated from Harvard College in 1776 and subsequently studied law, commencing practice in 1782. A member of the Continental Congress in 1787, he was elected as a Federalist to the United States Congress in 1789, serving until 1801 when he accepted a judicial appointment. He served on the bench in Massachusetts for the next two decades, ending his career as a judge on the Supreme Court of Maine, which separated from Massachusetts in 1820. He died in 1824.

Adapted from the *Biographical Directory of the American Congress, 1774-1971* (United States Government Printing Office, 1971).

STUDENT RESOURCE: WORKSHEET I

PREDICTING POLITICAL BEHAVIOR FROM BIOGRAPHICAL DATA

Instructions:

1. Read through the assigned biographies (DOCUMENTS A and B).

2. Make a list in column one of the kinds of facts each biography gives you about each representative (example: date of birth).

3. Decide which kinds of information will be the most important in guessing how each representative actually felt about the petitions.

Biographical Facts	Importance of this biographical fact as a predictor of views in debates over anti-slavery petitions.			
	Very Important	Somewhat Important	Not Very Important	Not at All Important
1.				
2.				
3.				
4.				
5.				
6.				
7.				
8.				
9.				
10.				

4. What facts in the biographies seem unimportant?

5. What additional information not contained in the biographies would help you determine each representative's position on this issue?

ASSESSING POLITICAL BEHAVIOR FROM BIOGRAPHICAL DATA

Instructions: Part One/Lesson One

1. Based on your decision, write down in the first column how you predict each person voted. **Stop before filling the second column, the Actual Position!**

Instructions: Part Two/Lesson Two

2. Read the debates (DOCUMENTS C and D) and compare your predictions to each representative's actual position. Write your answer in the second column.

1790 Debates

Name	Predicted Position	Actual Position
Mr. Burke		
Mr. Gerry		
Mr. Jackson		
Mr. Madison		
Mr. Scott		
Mr. Seney		
Mr. Smith		
Mr. Tucker		

STUDENT RESOURCE: WORKSHEET II

1800 Debates

Name	Predicted Position	Actual Position
Mr. Dana		
Mr. Jones		
Mr. Lee		
Mr. Otis		
Mr. Randolph		
Mr. Rutledge		
Mr. Thatcher		

PREDICTING POLITICAL BEHAVIOR: WRITING A SPEECH

You have predicted the views of up to fourteen members of Congress regarding commitment of anti-slavery petitions. Now you'll predict what one of them might have said.

1. You will choose or be assigned a member of Congress.

2. Write a speech of one to two pages defending the position you've predicted that member of Congress would have taken.

3. Use **at least ten** of the words from the 18th-century vocabulary list in this packet.

4. You may be asked to deliver your speech. Make it good!

5. After you are done, you will be able to check your version against the views actually expressed in 1790 or 1800.

LESSON TWO

ACCOUNTING FOR POLITICAL BEHAVIOR IN THE 1790 & 1800 DEBATES

A. Objectives

1. Students will appreciate that regional affiliations did not consistently determine voting behavior.

B. Lesson Activities (One to Three Days)

1. Having **predicted**, in lesson one, the positions representatives would take, students now should **test** those predictions against the evidence. To do so, they will need to read **DOCUMENTS C AND D**, the 1790 and 1800 debates. Options include:

   a. Reading the debates themselves in class

   b. Reading the debates to one another in groups

   c. Performing the debates in a "Reader's Theatre" setting.

2. Once students have heard or read the debates, they can go back to **WORKSHEET II** and write down the actual position each representative took in the second column. If students were grouped for **LESSON ONE**, they should regroup to compare their findings.

   Most students will probably have based their predictions on sectional origin: they will have pegged Northerners as abolitionists and Southerners as pro-slavery. This works for **most** of the debaters but not all. The exceptions include James Madison of Virginia, who in 1790 questioned whether the proceeds from the sale of western lands might not be used to gradually buy freedom for slaves. Another excep-

tion, Massachusetts representative Harrison Gray Otis, feared that news of the petition might be enough by itself to encourage a slave revolt.

3. The class can now discuss student findings. The following questions may assist in developing discussion:

   a. Which of the biographical "facts" in **WORKSHEET I** best predicted political behavior?

   b. What about exceptions? (Students may offer many different explanations. Some may notice a difference between representatives from South Carolina and Georgia and those from Virginia. Others may try to establish a link with party affiliation).

4. Students might at this point "brainstorm" to list exceptions and possible explanations for them on the board or on a sheet of newsprint. It is important that each possibility be recognized as a legitimate hypothesis.

C. Extended Activities

1. *Predicting Political Behavior from Remarks in the Anti-slavery Debates*: **WORKSHEETS IV** and **V** require that students read the debates **first**. Once they have read the debates, they are to predict, from the evidence of the debates themselves, the political party and regional identity of each debater.

   In effect, **WORKSHEETS IV** and **V** reverse the process of **WORKSHEETS I** and **II**. They are particularly suited for Advanced Placement students who are perhaps more familiar with the party ideologies of the 1790's.

2. Using **WORKSHEET V**, students can tailor their predictions about party and regional affiliation into speeches on other issues of political importance in the 1790's. A student who predicts that Otis was a Northern federalist might, for example, write a speech in which Otis defends the Alien and Sedition Acts. After writing the speech, the student would then receive the biographies and be able to check prediction against fact.

3. *Research in Current Affairs*: Have groups of students research votes taken in the city council, state legislature, or U.S. Congress on a particular issue. Students should attempt to explain why representatives chose to cast their votes as they did.

4. *Research in Sectional Division*: The exceptions aside, geography was the best predictor of political behavior in the 1790 and 1800 debates. A class might be divided into groups of four students each; each group would be asked to "track" a particular region of the country through the 19th century, doing library research when necessary, to determine regional interests (if any) in significant political issues.

STUDENT RESOURCE: DOCUMENT C

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES DEBATE ON A PETITION FROM THE PENNSYLVANIA SOCIETY FOR PROMOTING THE ABOLITION OF SLAVERY: FEBRUARY, 1790

(Primary Source)

On February 3, 1790, a memorial was received by Congress from the Pennsylvania Society for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery. The petition read:

> ***...The Christian religion teaches us to believe that mankind are all formed by the same Almighty Being, alike objects of his care, and equally designed for the enjoyment of happiness, and the political creed of Americans fully coincides with the position. Your memorialists...have observed, with real satisfaction, that many important...powers are vested in you for "promoting the welfare and securing the blessings of liberty to the people of the United States;" and as they conceive that these blessings ought rightfully to be administered, without distinction of color, to all descriptions of people...***
>
> ***From a persuasion that equal liberty was originally...and is still the birth-right of all men; and influenced by the strong ties of humanity...your memorialists conceive themselves bound to use all justifiable endeavors to loosen the bands of slavery...Under these impressions, they earnestly entreat your serious attention to the subject of slavery; that you will be pleased to countenance the restoration of liberty to those unhappy men, who alone, in this land of freedom, are degraded into perpetual bondage, and who, amidst the general joy of surrounding freemen, are groaning in servile subjection; that you will devise means for removing this inconsistency;...that you will promote mercy and justice towards this distressed race, and that you will step to the very verge of the power vested in you for discouraging every species of traffic in the persons of our fellow-men.***
>
> *BENJ. FRANKLIN, President*
> *Philadelphia, February 3, 1790.*

STUDENT RESOURCE: DOCUMENT C

The petition provoked a debate in the House. Some members asked that it be committed to a House committee for consideration, others that it be rejected. Portions of the debate follow.

Mr. Tucker: I am sorry the petition has been read. I conceive it contains an unconstitutional request, and from that consideration I wish it to be cast aside. I fear its commitment would be a very alarming circumstance to the Southern States; for...it will be considered as an interference with their rights; thus the people will...lament that they ever put additional powers into Federal hands.

Do these men expect a general emancipation of slaves by law? This would never be submitted to by the Southern States without a civil war. Do they mean to purchase their freedom? I believe their money will fall far short of the price! But let me ask...are they the only persons who possess religion and morality?

Mr. Seney: I don't see anything unconstitutional in the memorial... Its only object was, that Congress should exercise its Constitutional authority to abate the horrors of slavery as far as it could.

Mr. Burke: ...I must insist that it did pray for an unconstitutional measure. Did it not desire Congress to interfere and abolish the slave trade, while the Constitution expressly stipulates that Congress shall exercise no such power? I am certain that its commitment to committee would sound an alarm, and blow the trumpet of sedition in the Southern States. I am sorry to see this Congress pay more attention to this petition than to the Constitution. I will do my duty; if it is referred to a committee...and if I am appointed to that committee, I will refuse to serve.

Mr. Scott: I cannot entertain a doubt but the memorial is strictly agreeable to the Constitution...I, for one, am sorry that the framers of the Constitution did not...enable us to interdict the traffic entirely; for I look upon the slave trade to be one of the most abominable things on earth, and if there was neither God nor devil, I should oppose it upon the principles of humanity and the law of nature.

I cannot, for my part, conceive how any person can be said to acquire a property in another... The petitioners view the subject in a religious light, but I do not stand in need of religious motives to induce me to reprobate the traffic in human flesh...and to support every Constitutional measure likely to bring about its total abolition. Perhaps, in our Legislative capacity, we can go no further than to impose a duty of ten dollars on importation of slaves, but I do not know how far I might go, if I was one of the Judges of the United States and [slaves] were to come before me and claim their freedom; I am sure I would go as far as I could.

Mr. Jackson: I differ with the previous gentleman... He said he did not stand in need of religion to induce him to reprobate slavery, but if he is guided by that evidence upon which the Christian system is founded, he will find that religion is not against it. He will see, from Genesis to Revelations, [that Christianity sanctions slavery]. There never was a Government on the face of the earth but what permitted slavery. The purest sons of freedom in the Grecian Republics, the citizens of Athens and Lacedaemon all held slaves. On this principle the nations of Europe are associated; it is the basis of the feudal system.

Mr. Smith: The petitioners [charge]...the owners of negro property...with a want of humanity. I believe the proprietors have as much humanity as persons in any part of the Continent, and are as conspicuous for their good morals as their neighbors.

[Regarding the Quakers], what may appear a moral virtue in their eyes may not be so in reality. I have heard of a sect of Shaking Quakers which...forbids [its members to marry]. Now, if these people were to petition Congress to pass a law prohibiting matrimony, would gentlemen agree to refer such a petition? I think if they would reject one of that nature...they ought also to reject this.

Mr. Madison: This debate has taken a serious turn, and it will be owing to this alone if an alarm is created... If there was the slightest tendency by committing this petition to break in upon the Constitution, I would object to it; but I do not see upon what ground such an event is to be apprehended.

The petition prays, in general terms, for the interference of Congress, so far as it is constitutionally authorized.

I know that the Congress is restricted by the Constitution from taking measures to abolish the slave trade; yet there are a variety of ways by which Congress can abolish slavery. Regulations might be made in relation to the introduction of slavery into the new States to be formed out of the Western Territories.

Mr. Gerry: I think the interference of Congress is fully compatible with the Constitution. I can't help lamenting the miseries to which the natives of Africa are exposed by this inhuman commerce. I never contemplate the subject without reflecting what my own feelings would be if I, my children, or my friends were placed in the same deplorable circumstances... That we have a right to regulate this business is as clear as that we have any rights whatever.

Congress can, agreeably to the Constitution, lay a duty of ten dollars on imported slaves; we may do this immediately. Further, I would calculate the value of slaves in the Southern States as worth ten million dollars. Congress has a right, if we see it proper, to make a proposal to the Southern States to purchase all of their slaves. The resources of the Western Territory might furnish Congress with the means. I do not intend to suggest a measure of this kind; I only mention these particulars to show that Congress certainly has a right to meddle in the business. I see no objection to commitment of the memorial.

The memorial was committed by a vote of 43-14. The committee which considered the petition was a "committee of the whole" consisting of the entire membership of the House. It debated action on the petitions once again on Wednesday, March 17.

Mr. Burke: The Quakers call themselves friends of freedom. Yet during the late war, they were for bringing this country under a foreign yoke; they descended to the character of spies; they supplied the enemy with provisions; they were guides...to their armies....

[A "warm altercation" ensues on the floor of the House over Burke's words, which is

shouted down by the House leadership. Mr. Smith then takes the floor.]

Mr. Smith: The memorial from the Quakers contains, in my opinion, a very indecent attack on the character of those States which possess slaves.... I can't but consider [such words] as calculated to fix a stigma of the blackest nature on the State I have the honor to represent, and to hold its citizens up to public view as men divested of every principle of honor and humanity....

I ask you: Did the Constitution, in express terms, vest this Congress with the power of manumission?... Even if Congress had such a power and was disposed to exercise it, would the Southern States acquiesce in such a measure without a struggle? Would even the citizens of the other States which did not possess this property, desire to have all the slaves let loose upon them? Would not such a step be injurious even to the slaves themselves?

Nothing is stronger proof of the absurdity of emancipation than the fanciful schemes which the friends to these measures have suggested. One was, ship them out of the country and colonize them in some foreign region...Surely it would be inconsistent with humanity to banish these people to a remote country and to expel them from their native soil... How could they be called freemen if they were, against their consent, to be expelled from the country?

...Another plan is to liberate all those [in slavery] who are born after a certain year. Such a scheme would produce this very extraordinary phenomenon, that the mother would be a slave and her child would be free. These young emancipated negroes, by associating with their enslaved parents, would participate in all the debasement which slavery is said to occasion....

[As for the Quakers], did they contribute to strengthen the country against invasion by staying at home and joining the invader as soon as he was successful? They furnished money and paid substitutes. Did not the slaves, by increasing the agriculture of the country, add to its wealth and thereby increase its strength?... The Southern citizens might ... consider toleration of Quakers as an injury to the community... Yet the people of

those states did not ask the assistance of Congress to exterminate the Quakers!

> In any event, a proper consideration of this business must convince every candid mind that emancipation would be attended with one or another of these consequences: either that a mixture of the races would degenerate the whites, without improving the blacks, or that it would create two separate classes of people in the community, involved in inveterate hostility, which would terminate in the massacre and extirpation of one or the other... The negroes would not be benefitted by it...

No further action was taken on the petition, which was tabled.

Adapted from the *Congressional Record* for the First and Sixth Congress.

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STUDENT RESOURCE: DOCUMENT D

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES DEBATE ON A PETITION FROM ABSALOM JONES AND OTHER "FREE MEN OF COLOR" OF PHILADELPHIA: JANUARY, 1800

(Primary Source)

The following debate took place on Thursday, January 2 and Friday, January 3 regarding a petition from Absalom Jones and other "free men of color" of Philadelphia. *The Congressional Record* reported that:

> ***The petitioners...represented that they could not but be impressed with the hardships under which numbers of their color labored, who they conceived equal objects of representation and attention with themselves or others under the Constitution.***
>
> ***That solemn compact, the Constitution, was violated by the trade of kidnapping, carried on by the people of some of the Southern States...by which numbers were...torn from their families and...inhumanely exposed to sale, which was degrading to the dignified nature of man.***
>
> ***That by these and other measures injurious to the human species, there were 700,000 blacks now in slavery in these States.***
>
> ***They stated their application to Congress to be, not for the immediate emancipation of the whole, knowing that their degraded state and want of education would render that improper, but they ask for an amelioration of their hard situation. They prayed that the act called the fugitive bill, which was very severe on that race of people, might be considered, also that the African slave trade might be [stopped].***

Below are excerpts from the debate over whether the petition ought to be committed to a House committee.

Mr. Rutledge: Those gentlemen [Quakers] who used to come forward, to be sure, have not come forward again, but have now put it into the hands of the black *gentlemen*. They now tell the House these people are in slavery — I

thank God they are! if they were not, dreadful would be the consequences. They say they are not represented. To be sure a great number of them are not....

Already has too much of this newfangled French philosophy of liberty and equality found its way...among these [so-called] *gentlemen.*

Mr. Otis: I have never seen a petition presented under a more dangerous and unpleasant aspect. It appears to be subscribed by a number of individuals who are incapable of writing their names or of reading the petition and...of digesting the principles of it...To encourage a measure of this kind...will teach [slaves and former slaves] the art of assembling together, debating, and the like, and will soon, if encouraged, extend from one end of the Union to the other....

I thank God I have no slaves, nor do I wish to possess any. Yet I think the subject ought not to be meddled with by the General Government, and if any grievances exist they are properly and only objects of legislation in the several States... I think those who do not possess this species of property had better leave its regulation with those who are cursed with it.

Mr. H. Lee: We were sent to this House to protect the rights of the people and the rights of property. That property which the people of the Southern States possess consists of slaves, and therefore Congress has no authority but to protect it, and not take measures to deprive the citizens of it.

Mr. Rutledge: It is so improper to consider this subject that if it [were thought that Congress would regulate slavery], some of the States would never have adopted the federal form of government.

Mr. Thatcher: I think the gentlemen [who have spoken so far] have set out wrong on this subject... Would any gentleman say that [Congress should not] legislate about 700,000 enemies in the very body of the United States? While they are slaves, they are enemies. I declare that a greater evil than [this] cannot exist; it is a cancer of immense magnitude that will some time destroy the body politic, unless a proper legislation should prevent the evil. It must come before the House sooner or later. Then why postpone it?

Whether the petitioners were black or white, whether they could write, or whether not, is entirely immaterial: they stated their sufferings under a law of the United States and that is argument enough for a respectable reference (to committee). Because they can not write, are their rights to be [denied] them? Strange doctrine! A great reason why they could not write was their being brought up in early life in slavery.

Mr. Dana: If the petition before the House contained nothing but...French metaphysics of liberty and equality, I would think it would be likely to produce some of the dreadful scenes of Santo Domingo. If I believed it was only the effects of a religious fanaticism... I might be disposed to think it quite wrong. But when I perceive a petition, addressed in a language which is very decent and which expressly declares that the petitioners do not wish the House to do what is inconsistent with the Constitution... I think it ought to be received and committed.

Mr. Jones: The petition throws so much aspersion upon the State I represent that I must rise... I will show that the petitioners actually have asked what it is *not* in the power of Congress to legislate upon—emancipation.

First, the petitioners contemplate that slaves ought to be represented "with us and the rest of the citizens of the United States."....I would ask the gentlemen of this House whether, with all your philanthropy, you would wish to see those people sitting by your sides, deliberating in the councils of the nation? I presume not.

They go on farther and say, "We do not ask for the immediate emancipation of all, but we ask you to prepare the way for the oppressed to go free, that every yoke might be broken, thus keeping up the principle to do unto others as you would they should do unto you." The words need only be read to convince every man what is the tendency of their request.

I do not think [slavery] is an evil; would you have these people turned out in the United States to ravage, murder, and commit every species of crime? I believe it might have been happy for the United States if these people had never been introduced amongst us, but I do believe that they have been immensely benefited by coming amongst us.

STUDENT RESOURCE: DOCUMENT D

Mr. Thatcher: To make use of the incapacity of these people to read or write, as an argument against committing their petition must arise out of the prejudice of my colleagues against the general object; otherwise, nobody would ever have resorted to such pitiful and, I might say, mean and virulent remarks.

[Objections from the floor; "Order!" is called]

This appears to me a very respectful petition; it matters not whether the people are black or white; the petition only is to be regarded, not the color of the persons... Surely, then, every measure ought to be adopted to alleviate their sufferings. Is it consistent that the House, instead of a reasonable and patient attention, should come forward and treat this complaint with inattention...?

Was contempt the way to recommend attachment to the government?

[Mr. Thatcher continued his remarks the following day...]

I am willing, for the sake of argument, to admit that slavery exists and is sanctioned by the laws and Constitution of the United States... Surely it would be desirable if this great evil should be destroyed, if it could be done without injury, nay, with advantage to the possessors. Does the petition go any farther than this? It does not.

The Vice President of the Government of the United States [Thomas Jefferson] has devised a means to procure this object... Even if a certain sum of money was wanting for this purpose, I do not believe the House would refuse to appropriate it. Who would withhold a few dollars from his purse to facilitate it? While such are the propositions, a petition on behalf of its accomplishment ought to be heard; if it is not, it must fix a national indignity and stigma which ages of good actions could never wipe away.

Mr. Rutledge: I use strong words because no others would be appropriate. Gentlemen recommend that the subject be calmly argued. Would gentleman feel calm if measures were taken to destroy most of their property? Would calmness be consistent if entering wedges were prepared to ruin the

property of whole estates? If ever it was justifiable to be warm on any subject in this House, it surely is on an occasion like the present....

The move to commit the petition to committee failed by a nearly unanimous vote; only Mr. Thatcher dissented.

This image of Reverend Absalom Jones, is reproduced with the kind permission of the copyright owner, Schomburg Center for Research in Black History, The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations.

STUDENT RESOURCE: WORKSHEET IV

PREDICTING PARTY AND REGIONAL AFFILIATION FROM POLITICAL BEHAVIOR

Instructions:

1. You will choose or be assigned one or more representatives to work with. You will read that representative's arguments regarding commitment of an anti-slavery petition.

2. You don't know your representative's party or regional loyalties. Is he a Virginia Federalist? A New York Democratic-Republican? Your task is to use his speech(es) to make a guess.

3. Having read the speeches, list all the information from the speech which might indicate your representative's party and regional affiliation. Information might include the **position** he's taking in the debate, the kinds of arguments he uses, or the attitudes he expresses towards particular regions, groups, or individuals.

   You may find it helpful to consult the map included in this packet to get an idea of where slavery was concentrated in the 1790's.

4. Once you've made your decision, write it down on the chart provided.

5. There's a writing assignment to complete, but after you're done with it, read your representative's biography and compare your prediction with the information you find there.

STUDENT RESOURCE: WORKSHEET IV

1790 Debates

Name	Predicted Party and Region	Actual Party and Region
Mr. Burke		
Mr. Gerry		
Mr. Jackson		
Mr. Madison		
Mr. Scott		
Mr. Seney		
Mr. Smith		
Mr. Tucker		

STUDENT RESOURCE: WORKSHEET IV

1800 Debates

Name	Predicted Party and Region	Actual Party and Region
Mr. Dana		
Mr. Jones		
Mr. Lee		
Mr. Otis		
Mr. Randolph		
Mr. Rutledge		
Mr. Thatcher		

PREDICTING PARTY AND REGIONAL AFFILIATION: WRITING A SPEECH

You have predicted the party and regional affiliations of up to fourteen members of Congress. Now you'll use that information to write a speech one of those representatives might have delivered on an economic, political, or foreign policy issue of the 1790's.

1. You will choose or be assigned a member of Congress.

2. Write a speech of one to two pages defending the position you've predicted that member of Congress would have taken on the issue you've selected.

3. Use **at least ten** of the words from the 18th-century vocabulary list in this packet.

4. You may be asked to deliver your speech. Make it good!

LESSON THREE

EVALUATION OF ARGUMENTS

A. Objectives

1. Students will infer from the debates the arguments for and against federal limits on slavery.

2. Students will analyze what qualities make an argument "persuasive".

B. Lesson Activities (One to Three Days)

1. Refer back to the debates, **DOCUMENTS C** and **D**, from **LESSON TWO**.

2. Now evaluate the arguments using **WORKSHEETS VI** and **VII**.

   a. **WORKSHEET VI** asks that students list arguments **in favor** of committing the petitions (that is, against slavery);

   b. **WORKSHEET VII** asks that they list arguments **against** committing the petitions.

   c. Students could compile their lists as homework following **LESSON TWO** or complete the lists in pairs. If students are paired up, one student can complete **VI**, another **VII**; each student can then check the other's work.

   d. Alternatively, students might compile their lists as members of groups responsible for presenting one side in a classroom reenactment of the debates; in this case each group would complete either **VI** or **VII**.

3. Once the lists are complete, students should fill in the appropriate matrix either individually, in groups, or as a class. The worksheets ask students to assess how "persuasive" each argument is. Students should understand that there are several levels of "persuasion." A representative from Massachusetts might not be persuaded to support slavery but might be persuaded against committing the petitions on the grounds that it would destroy the union.

4. Some questions which might assist in this discussion:

   a. What makes an argument "persuasive" to you?

   b. How much of a role do emotional appeals, evidence, and logic play in making an argument appealing? To what degree do each of these elements appear in the arguments of 1790 and 1800?

   c. What arguments might have seemed persuasive then which would not seem persuasive now?

5. The discussions engendered by this lesson can feed very well into the curricular materials designed to encourage critical thinking. See for example Kevin O'Reilly's series *Critical Thinking in American History* (Critical Thinking Press, 1983; available from Social Studies School Service).

INSTRUCTIONS FOR USING WORKSHEETS VI AND VII

Before completing **WORKSHEETS VI** and **VII**, do the following:

1. Underline or highlight the argument each side uses in its effort to persuade undecided representatives to its viewpoint. For example, Mr. Burke, the third representative to speak in the excerpts from the 1790 debate, makes two arguments:

   a. The petition asks that Congress interfere with the slave trade, and hence asks that Congress take unconstitutional action.

   b. Some members of Congress are more concerned with the contents of the petition than they are with the Constitution.

2. List five or six such arguments from each side. Some arguments appear in several speeches. Your list should include five or six **different** arguments.

3. Put a checkmark in the category which best represents your attitude toward the argument. Are you persuaded, for example, that the 1790 petition asks that Congress take action forbidden by the Constitution? That members of Congress favoring commitment of the petition care more about the petition itself than about the Constitution?

4. Answer the questions which follow the grid, either alone or in a group as assigned.

STUDENT RESOURCE: WORKSHEET VI

ARGUMENTS IN FAVOR OF COMMITTING THE PETITIONS

Argument	Very Persuasive	Somewhat Persuasive	Not Very Persuasive	Not at All Persuasive
1.				
2.				
3.				
4.				
5.				
6.				

Questions:

1. Which was the **least** convincing argument in favor of committing the petitions? Why did this argument seem weakest?

2. Which was the **most** convincing argument in favor of committing the petitions? Why did this argument seem strongest?

STUDENT RESOURCE: WORKSHEET VII

ARGUMENTS AGAINST COMMITTING THE PETITIONS

Argument	Very Persuasive	Somewhat Persuasive	Not Very Persuasive	Not at All Persuasive
1.				
2.				
3.				
4.				
5.				
6.				

Questions:

1. Which was the **least** convincing argument against committing the petitions? Why did this argument seem weakest?

2. Which was the **most** convincing argument against committing the petitions? Why did this argument seem strongest?

VOCABULARY FOR 1790 AND 1800 DEBATES

acquiesce in: agree to. "Would the Southern States acquiesce in such a measure without a struggle?"

alleviate: ease. "We must alleviate their sufferings."

altercation: debate. "A warm altercation began" (In the 18th century, "warm" meant what "angry" or "hot" now means).

apprehend: understand, predict. "I do not see upon what ground such an event is to be apprehended."

appropriate: to put aside money, to budget. "Congress has not yet appropriated funds for this purpose."

aspect: circumstances, conditions. "I have never seen a petition presented under a more dangerous and unpleasant aspect."

Athens: The capitol of Greece, admired by 18th century writers for its ancient government.

commitment: In these debates, if Congress were to "commit the petition", it would allow a committee to study and report on the petition.

conceive: 1. believe. "They conceive that these blessings ought rightfully to be administered, without distinction of color, to all descriptions of people." 2. imagine. "I cannot conceive how any person can be said to be less than equal under this Constitution."

contemplate: consider, think about. "I never contemplate slavery without reflecting what my own feelings would be if I, my children, or my friends were placed in the same deplorable circumstances."

contempt: the act of despising. "Is contempt for these petitioners the proper way to encourage their loyalty to the government?"

STUDENT RESOURCE: DEBATE VOCABULARY

countenance: consider, pay attention to. "Please countenance the restoration of liberty to those unhappy men."

deliberation: debate, consideration. "The petitions resulted in three days of Congressional deliberation."

deplorable: worthy of condemnation. "Slaves are in deplorable circumstances."

devised: created, invented. "We have not yet devised a solution to the problem."

divest: give up, strip off. "Are we divested of every principle of honor and humanity?"

emancipation: freeing of a slave. "Manumission" usually referred to one slave-owner's independent decision to free one or more of his slaves. "Emancipation" referred to the liberation of all slaves.

endeavors: efforts. "Your memorialists conceive themselves bound to use all justifiable endeavors to loosen the bands of slavery."

ensue: begins. "A debate soon ensued."

entreat: ask. "We entreat your serious attention to the subject of slavery."

feudal system: The economic system of medieval Europe. In a feudal society, a few families control most of the fertile land. Most of those without land work for these families in exchange for wartime protection.

Genesis: The first book of the Bible.

incapacity: inability. "Their incapacity to read or write is not important."

induce: convince. "Nothing can induce me to support the slave traffic."

interdict: halt, interfere with, intercept. "The framers of the Constitution did not enable us to interdict this traffic entirely."

STUDENT RESOURCE: DEBATE VOCABULARY

Lacedamon: Another term for the Greek region controlled by the city of Sparta, admired by 18th century writers for its ancient government.

law of nature: 18th century writers often used the "law of nature" to mean the law of God.

legislate, legislation: To "legislate" means to write bills which, once enacted become law. "Legislation" consists of such proposed laws.

manumission: freeing of a slave. "Manumission" usually referred to one slave-owner's independent decision to free one or more of his slaves. "Emancipation" referred to the liberation of all slaves.

matrimony: marriage.

memorial, memorialists: petition, petitioners; persons signing their names to a petition—a request for action—addressed in this case to Congress.

metaphysics: literally, the study of the underlying causes of nature. When Dana refers to the "metaphysics of liberty", however, he is noting that French ideas about liberty and equality aren't taken particularly seriously in the House.

persuasion: belief. "From a persuasion that equal liberty was originally and is still the birth-right of all men . . ."

philanthropy: love of humanity. "With all your philanthropy, would you wish slaves free?"

procure: obtain, get. "Thomas Jefferson has a plan for procuring the end of slavery."

proprietors: owners or managers. "I believe the proprietors have as much humanity as any person in this country."

Quakers: A Christian sect, most numerous in Pennsylvania, which opposed slavery. Quakers were responsible for many of the early anti-slavery petitions presented to Congress.

STUDENT RESOURCE: DEBATE VOCABULARY

reproach: condemnation. "The reproach the petitioners cast upon the owners of negro property is want of humanity."

reprobate: condemn. "I must reprobate this traffic in human flesh."

Revelations: The last book of the Bible.

servile: slave-like. "They are groaning from servile subjection."

Several States: To distinguish the Federal Government from the governments of the states, speakers would refer to the governments of the "Several States"—meaning each of the states in the U.S.

Shaking Quakers: Also called **Shakers**, this Christian sect opposed marriage and expressions of sexuality.

species: kind. "This species of traffic is evil."

stigma: a mark of disgrace or discredit. "This petition is calculated to fix a stigma of the blackest nature on the State I have the honor to represent."

traffic: trade, commerce.

verge: edge, limit. "Step to the very verge of power vested in you for discouraging slavery."

virulent: venomous, bitterly or irresponsibly hostile. "Your remarks are, I might say, virulent."

Western Territories: Those territories between the Appalachian Mountains and the Mississippi River which the British gave up to the United States at the end of the Revolutionary War. The region north of the Ohio River had, by the time of these debates, already been closed to slavery as part of the Northwest Ordinance of 1787. The region south of the Ohio—the present states of Alabama, Mississippi, and Tennessee—remained open to slavery.

yoke: oppression. Originally, the word referred to the wooden loops around a farm animal's neck which connected it to the plow. "Before the Revolution, these States were under a foreign yoke."

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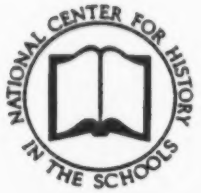
3. Jordan, Winthrop D. *White Over Black: American Attitudes Toward the Negro, 1550-1812*. Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1971 [1968]. Jordan's classic account traces the developing relationship between American slavery and American racism.

4. Nash, Gary B. *Forging Freedom: The Formation of Philadelphia's Black Community, 1720-1840*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988. Absalom Jones, who wrote the petition presented to Congress in 1800, was a leader of the Philadelphia African-American community. From this community also came Richard Allen, who in 1815 established the African Methodist Episcopal Church. This book provides background on a critical phase of African American history.

5. Ohline, Howard A. "Slavery, Economics, and Congressional Politics, 1790." *Journal of Southern History* (1980). 46:335-360. Ohline discusses the specific issues contributing to the positions taken by representatives in the 1790 debate. This article is appropriate for further student reading in Advanced Placement classes.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